Why We're Launching Revolutionary Workers & Leaving Socialist Alternative

Comrades,

We are launching a new organization, Revolutionary Workers.

We are doing so because the working class urgently needs a healthy revolutionary party, and we believe that Socialist Alternative has ceased to be that.

There is a major opening at present for Marxist politics and a party basing itself on active orientation to the class struggle. In this historic context, the leadership of SA has turned inwards. They are also attempting to force us, members of the Minority, to break the promises we made to working people when we relinquished our hard-won socialist city council office to launch Workers Strike Back.

We have made every attempt to convince the leadership and membership of Socialist Alternative to not go down this road. Unfortunately, in response to the concerns we raised, rather than a politically-clarifying debate, we have been met with de-politicized attacks, political dishonesty, and a determination to undermine the class struggle methods on which we've built this organization. In the Majority's May 5th vote to sharply undermine WSB, they explicitly rejected it as any kind of priority for SA and abandoned the proposals for building it as democratically agreed at the last SA Convention. Following that, they took repeated votes to try to put WSB under the sectarian control of the Majority comrades who were refusing to build it.

It would have been a criminal act if the political authority we won over the last decade through our socialist city council office had been used to betray working-class people — after taking a third of a million dollars in donations under the promise of building a "national movement", to then refuse to build chapters nationally, prevent working people from participating in the organization they had donated to and been asked to join, and finally to completely deprioritize and diminish even that limited organizing effort.

Sadly, this is exactly what Socialist Alternative's leadership tried to do. If we had remained in Socialist Alternative, the political discipline of the organization would have required us to join in this betrayal.

The New Period

Capitalism is in a historic crisis. The credibility of all its institutions and political parties lies in tatters.

A profound lack of leadership and low class consciousness have held back breakthroughs in the class struggle for decades, but we are now at the beginning of a turning point in consciousness and struggle.

Last year saw the biggest strike wave in the United States since organized labor's defeat by Reaganism. Millions of young people have already drawn conclusions about the importance of working-class power and strike action. Workers are showing a determination to win back past losses, and a significant layer is willing to fight for much more.

In this context, both the SA leadership in the U.S. and members of the ISA Majority have chosen to emphasize difficulties, rather than opportunities, and even to claim that the working class is moving to the Right. U.S. leaders of SA now say the new period is even more bleak and that an inward turn is required to "get our house in order."

In reality, the situation calls for the opposite approach. The working class needs a revolutionary party that is engaged effectively in class struggle and pointing a way forward as we did in Seattle over the last decade, not just discussing it.

Any revolutionary party worthy of the name needs to fight to try to find a path to the masses, not to be content with building by ones and twos, and that is why we are launching Revolutionary Workers.

Since the collapse of the mass workers' parties internationally, there has been no straightforward answer as to how to do this. The dual task, an expression which was formulated in the wake of the collapse of Stalinism but is now being increasingly dismissed by the Majority as outdated, attempted to point a way forward. But it does not offer us a formula so much as a recognition of the need to find a means to both build the revolutionary party and lead the way in class struggle, neither of which can be carried out without the other.

In the Age of Disorder, as ISA has discussed repeatedly (and we agree on this point), there's no basis for stable reformist parties of the working class. Far from absolving us of the responsibility to win authority with our class, this requires us to develop other ways to find a path to the masses, to fight to make breakthroughs and to build the forces of Marxism through them.

If pre-revolutionary conditions arrive and the forces of Marxism are weak and mostly untested in concrete struggle, we will be in no position to lead a socialist revolution. We saw that in France in 1968, and in many other times and places. It's not sufficient to have Marxist ideas if we have no authority with the working class or insufficient cadre with the ability and experience to lead. Equally importantly, as we have seen repeatedly with the SA Majority leadership, directing one's organization away from class struggle is a recipe for wrong perspectives and conclusions.

We reject the idea that Workers Strike Back is a resource drain, as the Majority would have it. It is in reality a major opportunity to step into the vacuum that exists for a broad class struggle based organization, and to build on the authority we won from the work we led in Seattle over the last decade.

Majority comrades have repeatedly emphasized the problem of proxy consciousness (working people recognizing the need to fight back but hesitating to join in the struggle themselves) as a reason why the class isn't ready for a fight. We see this phenomenon as indicating precisely the need for a broader organization that puts forward fighting demands and activates working people, while not asking for the same level of personal commitment that we do as a revolutionary party.

The vacuum of leadership on the Left does not negate the opening for Marxist ideas and leadership. On the contrary, in the context of millions of rank-and-file workers looking to fight back, it points to the urgent need for those ideas to reach the widest possible audience.

WSB is a fighting organization for those not yet convinced of the need for revolution, which – despite all the Majority's newfound talk of the Communist Youth – still characterizes the overwhelming majority of the working class. In our view, the best young people (including those already looking to Marxist ideas), are not mainly going to be won by revolutionary language, but by proven effectiveness in the class struggle.

These differences between us and the Majority will be tested in struggle.

We have now begun dynamically building Workers Strike Back, after a more than a year-long delay due to the SA leadership's ongoing war against it. Comrades looking for evidence that there's a basis for Workers Strike Back need look no further than our long overdue inaugural national Zoom meeting just held on July 21. We mobilized over 300 people to this event, with only the limited resources of our Minority members to rely on.

We blew past our $10,000 fundraising goal and raised over $14,000, actually receiving more in donations than was pledged during the meeting itself.

We have gained 84 new members of Workers Strike Back in July alone.

This is just the beginning. Now we will take this class-struggle organization and our new revolutionary party to the historic protests at the Democratic National Convention.

Sadly, SA's current leadership hasn't advocated for any class struggle alternatives to WSB. Instead, they see reading groups as the most important internal activity, and what they describe as a "more revolutionary presentation" as the main outward-facing tool to build the organization. This "more revolutionary presentation" has yet to be clearly defined, months after first raising it in comparison with the IMT. It still seems to us to be an attempted shortcut to recruitment, an alternative to orienting to the living class struggle, and a cover for an increasingly opportunistic approach to the labor bureaucracy and Democrats.

Reaching the Best Workers and Young People

Millions of working people, and perhaps a majority of young people, now see the capitalist system as rotten.

They don't need to be convinced there are fundamental problems. What they want to know is how can we get organized to fight back and win far-reaching change?

In some form or another, that is the question that Kshama is asked again and again in interviews. As Marxists, we have a responsibility to provide leadership on this question, and not just in the abstract, but through example in the class struggle.

At this moment, emphasizing a quote-unquote "more revolutionary presentation" isn't going to bring the best, most fighting layers of young workers to us. Every Left sect uses such language. We should have no hesitation to talk about revolution, but that in no way differentiates us in the current period.

Most of the best people to join SA over the last period did so on the basis that we were the ones who knew how to fight and win, because of the outstanding example of our socialist council office.

This was also the case historically. The CWI did not just passively exist in the mass working-class parties, but built their forces through campaigns focused on winning real

gains for working people and building socialist youth organizations internationally. The struggle led by The Militant in Liverpool was one of the peak achievements, but it grew out of a decades' long history of serious involvement in class struggles through which they developed experienced cadre who were capable of leading their class.

We believe the disagreements between Minority members and the Majority leadership over Workers Strike Back reflect fundamental differences over how to employ the dual task which, as stated above, was coined during a particular period based in part on a perspective that stable mass reformist workers' parties would sooner or later be rebuilt.

But the basic concept behind the dual task is a fundamental part of Marxism. When the First International developed, Marx immediately became its theoretical leader. But he not only wrote the international's founding documents, he also fought for it to effectively intervene in class struggle.

Unfortunately, SA's current leadership has long had an orientation toward a narrow conception of branch building based on an abstract propagandistic approach, and never really agreed with Minority leading members' approach to the dual task. They were happy to use the gains won for the working class through the Seattle City council office to recruit new members but had little interest in understanding, let alone replicating, the methods we used to win them.

In fact, if the approach to the dual task and instincts of the current Majority's wing of the leadership had carried the day, the victories in Seattle would never have happened.

A significant part of the national Executive Committee didn't want us to fight to win our first city council election campaign in Seattle in 2013. Some argued that Seattle should be turned into a recruitment campaign in the general election, with those resources redirected instead to the Minneapolis campaign that year. Current Minority members were accused of being "sectarian" for not agreeing to this, despite our clear arguments that Seattle had an equal or better chance of winning based on the relative strengths of the two campaigns.

After we won our 2013 election in Seattle, it soon became clear that Executive Committee members wanted us to do much less with the council office than we were doing. On that basis, it's safe to say we would not have won reelection campaigns, especially given our narrow vote margins. We would never have won the countless victories that improved the lives of many thousands of working and poor people.

In 2020, Executive Committee members initially vehemently opposed our launching the Tax Amazon campaign. Had we not won the Amazon Tax, it's also clear we wouldn't have been able to beat the right-wing recall in 2021.

Working-class victories, so rare in this period, can have a major impact on consciousness and make us stand out. The victories in Seattle were exceptions for a reason — they were the result of a different approach to the dual task and class struggle by the wing of the leadership which developed into the Minority, and who are now launching Revolutionary Workers.

It's striking that in this debate, the Majority leadership have not challenged these points about our differences in methods and how we used the council office. Instead, they have increasingly characterized our methods, which led to these historic victories, as "substitutionist."

Lost Opportunities for the Working Class

We are no longer convinced it was necessary or correct to abandon our socialist city council office position, particularly because Workers Strike Back was not then built by the national leadership in the way that was needed and promised.

This retreat in the class struggle could have been avoided if, from the beginning, the office had been treated like the invaluable national and international asset it was, rather than being seen by EC Majority members as an unwelcome political counterweight to their authority. Had the correct approach been taken, we could still be winning victories for our class with the council office this year, and using it as a tool to build the strength of Socialist Alternative and Workers Strike Back

Relinquishing the office was a huge loss for the working class and the forces of Marxism, and we feel it set the wrong example for a revolutionary party.

This would have been at least partly compensated for if Workers Strike Back had in fact been built, as promised, into a national organization with an active campaigning character and real life. Of course we believe this is still very much possible and necessary, though we now have a fight on our hands to catch up and realize WSB's full potential. We would never have agreed to the abandonment of our Marxist elected office if the Majority had been honest about their intention to not build WSB in any real way.

In hindsight, we should have launched something like Workers Strike Back years before. It could have served as a powerful way to consolidate and organize the forces

that we gathered around us in Seattle and build on our momentum nationally. Having the council office would also have presented a powerful opportunity to build WSB into a strong force in its initial years.

The decision to leave the office was rooted in the unfortunate reality that the rest of the EC and NC leadership had never agreed with really seizing the opportunity that had opened up in Seattle. This was reflected in how they failed to share responsibility for the work, outside of the election campaigns. The work of the council office, which entailed ongoing battles with the Democrats, NGO leaders, and labor bureaucrats, ended up falling overwhelmingly on a small number of comrades, led up by the Seattle Executive Committee.

Over the course of the decade of the council office, the national leadership remained inexcusably disengaged from the work. They paid so little attention to it that there were fewer than a dozen discussions about the council office work on the National Executive Committee or National Committee during the entire ten years of the council office.

The national and international organization did of course rally and fight during election campaigns. This was essential. However, in between elections, the office was left entirely to the Seattle leadership to manage with whatever resources it could muster.

Because of this lack of national prioritization, there was a real danger of burnout among the few comrades who were stretched extremely thin for such a long period. On top of this burnout was the strain created by the unhealthy dynamic in the national leadership directed at Seattle comrades.

It was in this context that Minority comrades did not fight back against the decision to relinquish the council office. We believe now this was a mistake. But we had only agreed on the basis that the national organization would build Workers Strike Back nationally and carry forward the momentum from the Seattle breakthrough.

We also don’t feel that the arguments made by most of the national leadership for why we should not run again were convincing or correct. The emphasis in those arguments stressed the difficulty of winning reelection: the challenges of changes in demographics, the consolidation of forces by the Democratic Party, and the shifting focus by working people away from elections toward the class struggle. This last point was in fact greatly exaggerated — most working people unfortunately continue to hold illusions in elections as the main avenue for change.

In regards to the other points, we feel that none of them justify giving up the only elected seat for Marxism in the U.S. in decades without a fight. We believe that we would have had a reasonable chance of defeating Joy Hollingsworth, the current District 3 councilmember. We would have been able to expose her as an establishment, corporate candidate, and to again use a bold working-class program and the momentum from our council office victories to draw working people into the struggle. But even had we lost after an all-out fight, it would have been a far better example for us to set as Marxists, rather than an abandonment of the position on the basis of what turned out to be a false promise.

A number of comrades internationally were surprised by our decision, recognizing that such a retreat by Marxists was in conflict with our tradition and needed compelling justification. The only compelling justification given, in our view, was the genuine opening for Workers Strike Back. Unfortunately, we did not realize how fiercely the rest of the national leadership would fight against building it.

What we failed to take into account was the longstanding and debilitating features of factionalism and federalism inside the organization, and the danger that Workers Strike Back would become their latest casualty.

The history of these problems in SA has been hinted at in the debates, but we believe it's worth spelling out somewhat more here so that lessons can be drawn out.

Factionalism & Federalism in the US Section

Kshama's election in 2013 made national and international headlines. She was the first revolutionary socialist elected to public office in decades. Working people were inspired and there were tremendous opportunities inherent in this. In Seattle, we seized on many of these, but we were always limited by the longstanding factional battles and inward-looking, sectarian tendencies in the organization and resulting limits those placed on our resources and options.

Prior to the first election in Seattle, in 2013, there had been years of discussion in the national leadership about establishing a national center in the U.S. section. Other sections of the CWI had national centers, and for very good reasons.They allowed for bringing the majority of fulltimers into a central location so that they could work together and build more cohesive teams and more cohesive national organizations. The main proposal in the U.S. had been for that national center to be located in New York, which made sense prior to the victory in Seattle.

In the US section, the need for a national center was even greater than elsewhere because of the size of the country and its history of factionalism and federalism.

Upon winning Kshama's position, there was an obvious case for this long-discussed national center to be immediately established in Seattle. The case for a national center was in reality made *more* compelling, because the victory had opened up so many opportunities.

Seattle should have been turned into ground zero for the national organization to make an even larger breakthrough, including more fully seizing on the building of a national profile, a more rapid growth in recruitment and development of cadre, fighting to elect a second socialist City Councilmember in Seattle, and a healing of the longstanding factional and regional rifts. Already, our biggest period of growth, all over the country, resulted from our winning the election and the $15 minimum wage in 2013 and 2014, respectively.

None of this is specific to Seattle. Had SA won in Minneapolis in 2013, instead of Seattle, then the national center should have been established there and all these same points would apply.

A national center never happened. And in fact the idea of locating it in Seattle was never even seriously discussed (despite Kshama and Calvin raising it), nor were significant resources moved to Seattle. In fact, comrades from other areas were *discouraged* from moving to Seattle. Why?

The signers of this letter who were present during this earlier period of the organization believe that the main cause was the factional rift in the organization. The wing of the leadership which is now the Majority had an ongoing conflict with the leadership based in Seattle. A temporary peace had been struck between these two wings of the leadership in the period just before the election victory, but it was a shallow one.

The unfortunate outcome of this was that leaders of the current SA Majority failed to put the interests of the national organization or the working class first and genuinely prioritize the new position and opportunities for growth.

It is notable that they failed to do this even after their longstanding conflict with Philip Locker and Stephan Kimmerle came to an end when they left the organization in 2018 to launch Reform and Revolution in DSA. We won't expand on the point here, but think it's important to note that the Seattle leadership at that time amongst themselves had differences about how to use the position, with Philip and Stephan on one side and

Kshama, Calvin and Adam on the other. In particular, Philip and Stephan strongly disagreed with the number of class battles we were taking up with the position, resulting in increasing conflicts with Democratic councilmembers and labor leaders which they wanted to avoid for opportunist reasons. They wanted to follow a more minimal approach to using elected office as was unfortunately the case in a number of other CWI (and later ISA) sections. Their opportunism also led them to want to dissolve the revolutionary party entirely into DSA, which is what their new organization did.

It's tragic that even after the split with Philip's group that the wing of the leadership which is now the Majority continued to take a factional approach. The departure of the Philip and Stephan wing opened up the possibility of healing the longstanding rift in the section. Instead of a change of course toward healthier methods, the current Majority leaders continued to treat Seattle as a competing organization not sufficiently under their control. In the process, they failed to combat an already inherent tendency towards regionalism, including a tendency for the leadership of some branches to see themselves in competition with one another and to develop along different paths.

This factionalism resulted in an ongoing failure to seize on the full opportunities presented by the council office victory. The final culmination of it now includes the loss of the council office, an organization once again in crisis, the undermining of Workers Strike Back, and a new split in Socialist Alternative. The very real danger of potential additional splits can be seen from the recent regional debates, with different branch leaderships and individuals supporting the Majority but using wildly conflicting arguments, sometimes along regional lines.

Despite the ongoing federalism and sectarianism, the organization that Minority leading comrades helped build in Seattle was two or three times the size of the next biggest branch over the last decade, while other branches with local concentrations of leading EC and NC members have seen substantial losses in membership.

The Majority's monumental mistakes cannot be undone, but they should serve as a cautionary tale about the dangers of factionalism and sectarianism within a revolutionary party.

Problems with ISA's approach

As we have previously noted, our differences are not only with the leadership of the US section, but also on some key issues within the wider international.

We believe the single biggest political difference to be expressed in the wake of the launch of ISA was over the Russia-Ukraine war, and that it was a mistake that this issue was allowed to be sidelined in the international debate.

It is notable that the slash-and-burn approach which the SA leadership took against the US Minority contrasts sharply with the approach taken by the ISA Majority (which includes the SA Majority) towards the Russian section. The Russian section has maintained its shocking and scandalous pro-imperialist position since the early days of the war.

While the US Majority has acted rapidly to try to drive the US Minority out of the section, and are now succeeding, the Russian section is outrageously still in the ISA and being funded by it, despite their blatantly pro-NATO position on Ukraine.

At root, we believe this is because the ISA Majority does not feel threatened in its control over ISA by the Russian section's pro-imperialist political position, and has deprioritized this central political issue in the context of fighting for control over ISA. They do feel threatened however by the ideas and criticisms of the US Minority.

Another key difference we see with the leadership of a number of other sections is around the question of the dual task. Some other sections of ISA have taken an approach on the dual task not unlike the US Majority. This includes making very limited use of elected positions, both in public office and in labor unions.

Unfortunately these differences have not been properly debated in the ISA, in part because of the ongoing crisis which became increasingly about the safeguarding case rather than questions on the dual task, transitional method, or Russia-Ukraine war. We would ourselves be very open to discussions on these questions with members from sections of ISA, despite our decision to leave.

We feel there is also sometimes an abstract propagandist approach to political developments by some sections. Recent articles on the French and U.K. elections call on leaders of movements – France Insoumise, and unspecified movement leaders in the UK – to launch mass parties of struggle, but without giving rank-and-file workers any role or direction. This is similar to the approach of the US Majority of calling on leaders of the labor bureaucracy to build a new party, when there are no remote prospects of them doing so, instead of the rank and file.

Marxists cannot be content with fantastical calls on established Left and labor leaders in a way that only serves to create illusions. The ISA is doing this too often at present,

while dismissing their own failure to grow and build as being due to difficult objective conditions.

ISA sections need to grapple with the lack of growth. No revolutionary party should be content with treading water, and the need to find a path to the masses is a primary question. While the initiative around ROSA is important, we feel that it has not been effectively used to build sections, and that it's too narrowly oriented toward the existing activist layer, with some sections making deeply concerning opportunistic concessions. At the same time, the IC Majority's imbalanced emphasis on going back to the basics of party building is also problematic.

The failure to grow in most sections of the ISA is for multiple reasons, but among them are ongoing weaknesses in the approach to the dual task, a refusal to take up concrete class-struggle fights, and in some cases a certain inertia and opportunism towards the labor bureaucracy.

The Dual Task in Seattle & Launch of WSB

In Seattle, no sooner were we elected than we launched our own campaign, 15 Now, to build the strongest possible movement to put pressure on the Democratic establishment.

This infuriated the union leaders with whom we had already clashed during the 2013 election campaign, and who were intent on cutting a deal behind closed doors with big business and the Democratic Mayor. Without building mass pressure, we would not have won the first $15 minimum wage in a major city, which is now the highest minimum wage in any major city in the nation, at $19.97 an hour, due to us wresting inflation adjustment from the bosses. (Note that the current all-Democrat City Council is getting ready to begin attacks on our $15 victory.)

Our Seattle $15 victory opened up the floodgates for the "Fight for 15" to win gains in city after city, benefiting literally millions of low-paid workers.

We of course won many many other victories with the office, including the Amazon Tax to fund affordable housing to the tune of over $200 million annually.

We won a long list of renters' rights laws, which corporate landlords are enraged about and pressing the new City Council to undermine. These include the right to an attorney for tenants facing eviction; a requirement for six months' notice for all evictions; caps on exorbitant move-in fees and a payment plan for them; school-year and winter eviction

moratoriums; the requirement that landlords pay relocation assistance worth three months' rent for rent increases of more than 10%; banning rent increases on buildings with housing code violations; a $10 cap on the late fees landlords can charge for overdue rent; and an end to exploitative "junk fees." A real estate lobbyist declared that every dollar spent on lobbying the Seattle City Council was wasted because the Democrats were afraid of our "red army."

That incredible track record of victories stands out not only in the U.S. Left but internationally as a powerful and yet tragically lone example in recent times of what can be won using class struggle methods.

Workers Strike Back was launched on the basis of the authority we had won through Kshama's office, and given as the reason she would not run again.

The Majority's argument that few people knew of the commitments we made when we launched Workers Strike Back is not only thoroughly cynical in its implications but entirely out of touch with reality. This commitment was very widely reported. Kshama's speech announcing WSB was reported on locally in The Seattle Times, SGN (formerly Seattle Gay News) Capitol Hill Seattle KIRO 7 and KUOW as well as The Stranger, which published Kshama's op ed "Why I'm Not Running Again for City Council: I'm Launching a National Movement Called Workers Strike Back", and nationally by *The Hill* and the *Associated Press* in a story reprinted in dozens of media outlets. Kshama was also interviewed by Chris Hedges in an episode of his YouTube show which was viewed by 50,000 people throughout the country. Kshama's op ed also formed the center page spread in Socialist Alternative newspaper in March of 2023. It still appears on SA's website.

The Majority's claim is also belied by the fact that our comrades routinely encounter genuine working people at tables who ask the question: why did Kshama give up her office when it was such a unique and powerful tool to fight for working people? In any case, it is repulsive for the Majority to claim that it didn't matter if we were lying to only a small section of the working class instead of a larger one. A crucial role of a revolutionary party is to win authority with working people — lying accomplishes the opposite.

We have concretely fought to involve working people in WSB in Seattle, despite the refusal of the Majority to build it nationally, and done our best to make it an organ of struggle. We've also consistently put forward a Marxist analysis of events and working class strategy through *On Strike*.

We used WSB to raise over $130,000 dollars to support the union campaign at KCVG. This fundraising campaign did not happen automatically. It had to be fought for within

the national EC by members who are now in the Minority. It ranks with our reelection campaigns as one of the most successful coordinated campaigns that SA has ever carried out, and it is outrageous that Majority members have mischaracterized this effort as simply “DSA style solidarity work”. Unlike the election campaigns it was national in scope and involved comrades and branches across the country over many months — in a way never tried before by Socialist Alternative. It’s deeply unfortunate that this successful national effort wasn’t used to build chapters of WSB in other areas.

Healthy Methods in a Revolutionary Party

Leaving the ISA is a very difficult decision. However, over the course of this debate, it has become clear that this leadership will not allow a change of course. This includes on Workers Strike Back, the broader approach to the dual task, questions of perspectives and priorities, and their increasingly unhealthy methods.

The failure to hold a politically clarifying debate, and instead employing an approach of scandalizing against the Minority, led to a rapid breakdown in the discussion and the failure to seriously assess the issues raised.

These problems in methods unfortunately go back many years, and they are part of an overall failure by the Majority wing of the leadership to openly put forward its views, put politics ahead of factional interests, and to prioritize the interests of the working class above their narrow desire for control over the organization.

The longstanding issues include a shadow-boxing approach to political differences on leading bodies combined with a cliquish and semi-factional atmosphere. This has long led to ongoing problems with working relations and this year to a complete breakdown in those relations.

We don’t think these issues can be adequately explained on the basis of personality conflicts. They reflect a bad approach of hiding or passive aggressively dealing with real political disagreements, rather than debating them out.

We believe this failure to openly and honestly argue for their political views is no accident, but rather a common feature of opportunism. They are the methods of a leadership trying to move away from the needs of the working class, and at the same time, trying to maintain tight control over the party.

Avoiding the political issues in this debate has prevented a serious debate over the political misconduct of the Majority: their undemocratic and unprincipled refusal to build

Workers Strike Back, their serious errors in the labor work, including squandering three elected labor positions and grave mistakes at KCVG, and their scandalous approach of paying fulltimers shamefully low wages while keeping them (illegally) as permanent contractors.

Over the course of the debate, the Majority's approach became increasingly toxic, seeking to castigate the Minority as "unprincipled" splitters, with less and less pretense even of responding to our political arguments.

Most recently, in a particularly sectarian attack, the SA EC has gone out of its way to instruct SA members to not participate in Workers Strike Back. This took the form of a letter to the membership which doubled down on the false claim that we are "hostile" to Socialist Alternative. Similarly, other sections of ISA have been instructed not to be interviewed by our On Strike broadcast, even though this would spread their ideas to a wider audience of thousands. This is textbook sectarianism and is destructive to the workers' movement that both we and the vast majority of the members of SA and ISA are committed to building. The fact that we have serious political disagreements with the national leadership of the US section of ISA means that it would be unprincipled for us to remain members of it, but the interests of the working class are not served by the artificial and sectarian division which the leadership of SA is trying to set up.

The culmination of the Majority's unhealthy methods took place at the final regional debate, held in Seattle with comrades from other West branches on Zoom. Majority members heckled, shouted and interrupted during the Minority's final sum up, in a show of sectarian methods in the tradition of the Stalinists who shouted down the Left Opposition in the 1930's — the worst such methods any of us have seen in the ISA or CWI during our time in the organization.

But in reality, the Majority's methods have been unacceptable since the beginning of this debate, and had already led to a number of the signers of this letter resigning from the organization previously.

Democratic centralism

Democratic centralism is an essential tool of the revolutionary movement. It is absolutely necessary in order to be able to build a party capable of carrying out a revolution, or even waging a serious fight in the class struggle.

But democratic centralism can also be misused, and we believe the Majority has done that in a number of ways over a long period.

The fundamentals of democratic centralism include a different balance at different times between democracy and centralism. When the party is in the heat of a class battle, it's necessary to lean on centralism, in order to focus all resources on defeating the bosses.

But when not in the heat of battle, and particularly when the issues are of real significance to the revolutionary party, the emphasis should be on the widest possible, most open democratic discussion. That is what should have happened in this debate, and often over the years, but sadly didn't.

Instead, the Majority used democratic centralism to limit the wider organization's access to the debate, including Kshama and Calvin's February letter to the NC, and then subsequently scandalized over each instance of the Minority bringing forward its views.

When we are making decisions about democratic structures and processes, we need to ask the same question we ask at other times: what is in the interests of the working class?

It would have been in the interests of the working class to bring these differences into the wider organization far sooner, and to focus on the political questions under debate rather than de-politicized attacks against the Minority.

It's in the best interests of the working class for politics to come first, not regional links or circles of loyalty. The question cannot be: who raised the idea, who's for it, who's against it. The question is whether that idea is correct.

The working class needs us to have a consistent and relentless focus on getting things right, of consistently putting politics first, the best ideas first, the interests of our class first.

This is a high bar — and mistakes will be made. But what was on display by the Majority in this debate was a terrible example for the revolutionary movement.

We must recognize that comrades have different strengths and weaknesses. We want to make the most of everyone's talents, and that is absolutely essential to our success.

To build a healthy party, revolutionaries need to also fight against sectarian leadership methods, wherein personal loyalty is used to decide that some will be promoted as leaders and others will be pushed aside – regardless of objective talents.

We also reject the Majority's stated and simplistic idea that comrades should be given maximum space to "learn by making mistakes." We say "stated" because the Majority certainly have circles of loyalty in the organization, and those who didn't pass the loyalty test have been penalized in various ways, including when having made mistakes.

The revolutionary party must be a combat organization — not a social club. Our enemies have far more resources. As a general rule in the revolutionary party, it's far better to learn from direct, honest feedback, than making our class pay the price for major mistakes.

But the approach to this question depends on the stakes involved in a given situation. There's far more room to learn by testing things out when the stakes are low. We do need to challenge comrades to gain experience and build political confidence, though we also don't want to set up comrades to fail. But when the stakes are higher, "learning through mistakes" is a completely insufficient approach. It is not a question of egos: we don't want preventable errors in a serious confrontation with the bosses and their political servants.

Finding the right balance in this is crucial to developing cadre who can lead in class battles.

This stated emphasis on "learning from mistakes" in the debate, if employed, would in fact trap us in an ongoing cycle of amateurish methods.

Lenin wrote in *What Is To Be Done* about the need to relentlessly battle against amateur methods in the revolutionary party. He described such methods as "a disease" and argued that to successfully defeat the ruling class, we need an organization built around professional revolutionaries with professional methods.

Lenin explained:

> *It is particularly necessary to arouse in all who participate in practical work, or are preparing to take up that work, discontent with the amateurism prevailing among us and an unshakable determination to rid ourselves of it.*

There is a chasm in political seriousness and professionalism between the weak approach to the campaign at KCVG and our work in Seattle. As we've explained in our other material, the KCVG campaign has been plagued by serious mistakes rooted in fundamental misunderstandings: failure to provide resources on the basis of completely erroneous understanding of substitutionism; serious failures of political preparation and planning; a massive underestimation of the scale of the fight we were taking on; the

failure to seek the advice of NC members with union experience whom they have unacknowledged political disagreements with; failure to build a strong campaign leadership team; and failure to understand and carry through the united front.

This has led to a campaign which never exceeded the level of 32% of cards being signed in the union drive, a Teamster affiliation vote which won the support of less than 10% of the workforce, and a campaign with a very narrow layer of active workers and a now hollowed-out organizing committee.

The difference in outcomes between Seattle and KCVG is first and foremost political, but it is also strongly linked to the level of political seriousness and professionalism in approach.

The victories in Seattle over the last ten years were made possible by a clear understanding of the dual task and a meticulous approach to getting things right with perspectives, political preparation, and political program. We seized the openings that appeared and were deadly serious about avoiding errors in the class struggle. This work was led by comrades who are now launching Revolutionary Workers. It required a meticulous approach to building movements and the united front. It was all this which led to one breakthrough after another.

Real responsibility means cadre doing what's necessary to get things right, not protecting themselves from criticism when they make serious mistakes, as the Majority have done in regards to KCVG.

But healthy methods in the revolutionary party do also mean being respectful, positive, and encouraging to comrades, even in the heat of battle. This is part of the meaning of the word comrade. We cannot, as the Majority does, have an approach of celebrating some comrades as heroes and treating others as nonentities or outcasts depending on whether a given comrade loyally follows their lead.

These unfortunately have been the shameful methods of this Majority leadership, and they are completely unviable for a healthy revolutionary party. There can be no loyalty tests — our loyalty must be to the best ideas and to the needs of the class struggle.

A turn towards opportunism

We reject the Majority's methods and the ways they are misusing democratic centralism. But we also recognize that those errors in methods are not apolitical.

It's no accident that these methods are being accompanied by a turn towards opportunism, because rotten methods are so often used to defend and hide opportunism.

We believe the Majority are bending to lesser evilism in the presidential election. They are doing so by taking a series of unclear positions and emphasizing what comes “after November.”

This includes postponing any steps in the direction of building a new party until after the election, including refusing to endorse Jill Stein (though we now hear they may do so under our pressure) despite the obvious reality that she is the most viable pro-worker, anti-war candidate, who also has, by far, the strongest program. Instead, some Majority members have actually repeated Democratic Party talking points attacking Stein. It's also striking that the Majority is consistently overstating the threat of a Trump “autocracy” or authoritarian regime — concerningly taking up liberal talking points often used in service of lesser evilism.

We have suspected for some time that were it not for our pressure, the Majority might well have gone further with an overwhelming emphasis on the abstract call for a new party, or even calling for a “safe states” strategy, with implied support for the Democrats in non-safe states, as some leading Majority members were hinting at in EC discussions.

Their opportunist direction is also visible in a TikTok posted on the Socialist Alternative Instagram account on July 27th, which feels the need to apologize for its limited criticisms of Kamala Harris on the basis of lesser evilism, saying that “criticizing Harris does not reduce her chances of election.” It orients its audience toward pressuring the Democrats to do better, saying to hold their “feet to the fire on issues of queer rights, abortion, police brutality, and the genocidal war in Gaza." The TikTok also drops any pretense of calling for a vote for anti-war candidate Jill Stein, instead making vague calls for a new party.

The Majority’s opportunism toward the labor leadership is also growing.

From their uncritical cheerleading of UAW President Shawn Fain, they are now posing the fantasy scenario that he would break with the Democrats and launch a new party. They recently extended an invitation to Teamsters President Sean O'Brien to the imaginary founding convention of this imaginary party in their article responding to his scandalous speech at the RNC, saying "Sean O’Brien would be welcome to speak

there!" Notably, O'Brien has since doubled down on this nationalist Right populism with his disgusting tweet using the hashtag #usagainsteverybody and an American flag, after both parties condemned a day of protests against Netanyahu's visit to Congress as "un-American."

The ideas and methods being used by the comrades in the "Build a Fighting NALC" (BFN) campaign are concrete proof of the direction all this is going. We can see this in their narrow use of a single democratic demand that put no real pressure on either the Post Office bosses, led by the notorious privateer DeJoy (about whose destructive actions BFN has almost nothing to say), or on the NALC union leadership. This is a far cry from the example set by the 1934 Minneapolis Teamsters of "aiming at the bosses and catching the union bureaucracy in the crossfire"!

While they have recently added some more concrete demands these are a case of too little, too late. For example, they don't include a call to end the two-tier pay system in place at the postal service since 2008. They also claim, unbelievably, that their demand for the right to strike can be won by lobbying Congress. While APWU members nationally just won a resolution in their union demanding an end to US military aid to Israel, the Majority has not raised any demands around Gaza in APWU's sister union NALC, despite our position there.

In their What We Stand For program in the newspaper, the leadership of Socialist Alternative now puts no figure on what the minimum wage should be. Even the Democrats make a weak call for a $15 minimum wage. Worst of all, the failure to support a $25 minimum wage, as Workers Strike Back and even Jill Stein does, is clearly no accident, since that figure was not supported by multiple EC and NC members in discussions on those bodies. It was admitted by an EC convenor that at least part of his opposition to the $25 demand was in order to make a concession to small businesses.

Opportunism goes hand in hand with avoiding the class struggle. It's less work and less risk of failure to do basic party building tasks instead of orienting to the class struggle. Avoiding class struggle also brings fewer risks of angering the political establishment or labor leadership, as the Majority is doing at NALC. This is because in order to overcome the opposition of those forces, you have to actively build. And the more you become a threat, the more dynamically you need to build.

The risks are also greater because if you go out on a limb and fail you will damage your authority, as the Majority has done at KCVG. The Majority's latest gesture at KCVG was a recent one-day ULP strike that was organized at four days' notice and attracted less

than 1% of the workforce–seemingly falling short of even the deflated internal target of 50 workers participating. This is an important lesson in the dangers of tailing the union bureaucracy. The Majority failed to prepare adequately for this action in part because they waited until the Teamsters leadership gave them the green light, which came at the very last minute. If they had begun laying the groundwork three months ago, when Minority members were advocating for it, they would have had a much better chance at succeeding. But the Majority chose not to because they did not want to step on the Teamster leaders' toes. This was also on display in their approach to the Labor Notes intervention, and in their refusal to publicize KCVG workers' vote to join the Teamsters.

It's far less challenging to do basic branch building and maintain "stability" than to take on the bosses, Democrats, or labor bureaucrats. But even that comfortable path does not lead to success for a revolutionary party. Ultimately, if you don't win political authority with the working class, you will sooner or later make yourself politically irrelevant, as SA largely was before the breakthroughs in Seattle.

Seizing Opportunities in the New Period

There are certainly many complications in the current period, including the growth of the Far Right, and we need to have accurate assessments. But part of that is recognizing that we are currently seeing some of the best conditions for Marxist politics since the collapse of Stalinism.

The capitalist crisis and significant steps forward in working-class consciousness have opened the door for more rapid growth.

The Majority has compared the current period unfavorably to 2010's, yet this earlier period in fact had greater barriers to Marxist ideas and the growth of revolutionary forces, including massive illusions in reforming the Democratic Party and the prospects for far-reaching change under capitalism through elections. There were very specific illusions in Bernie Sanders and the Squad, in unhealthy forms of identity politics, along with an overall much lower class consciousness.

We don't agree with ISA leadership's pessimistic assessment of the current period, and we feel that as we did in Seattle, it is necessary for us to once again lead by example.

We aim to build on the best traditions of the CWI as we see them.

The CWI was the only Marxist tendency to correctly understand the post-WWII colonial revolution, the capitalist boom in the advanced countries, the end of the boom in the 1970's and later the collapse of the Soviet Union and of the mass parties of the working class. Our point of departure is how revolutionaries need to relate to the present period and find a path to the masses.

We need to get the program and the perspectives right, and from that, we need to base our priorities on how we can seize concrete opportunities.

The correct application of the dual task will be crucial to our successes and failures. Our goal has always been to use the combination of WSB and On Strike as we used the council office: to raise Marxist ideas, involve working people in struggle, recruit the best of them to the revolutionary party, and politically develop cadre through this process. As with the council office, we will seek to involve others who aren't ready to join a revolutionary party, but agree with what we do, to be active in whatever ways possible. We were able to build a periphery that was active in our campaigns whether in an ongoing or sporadic way, and we can do the same with WSB. Also like the council office work, we will use WSB to expose the political establishment and the fundamentally rotten nature of capitalism itself.

Correct application of the united front was crucial to our successes, particularly with the 15 Now campaign and Tax Amazon. We can see how a misunderstanding of the united front can lead to serious errors, as we saw, and are still seeing, at KCVG with the Teamsters.

We can and will build Workers Strike Back, or whatever other avenues we identify in the class struggle, to find a path to the masses and grow our revolutionary forces. We will show in action, as we have already begun to show, that the assertions of SA's leadership that there is no opening for WSB are fundamentally false.

If you are a member of Socialist Alternative and you agree with some of the points we are raising but are unsure about others, please feel free to reach out to us with your questions.

And if you decide later you would like to consider joining Revolutionary Workers based on our ideas and seeing them put into action, we would welcome that.

We also welcome if current members of Socialist Alternative want to join us in building a chapter of Workers Strike Back. Contrary to the false assertions of SA's EC, neither Workers Strike Back nor Revolutionary Workers is "hostile" to SA.

We aim to work in a comradely, non-sectarian way with all existing and former sections of the ISA and CWI, while not hiding our disagreements.

Lastly, we don't agree with SA's leadership that we are the ones who are doing the leaving, at least not politically.

In our view, we are carrying forward the best traditions of this organization. If you joined Socialist Alternative because you were inspired by the work in Seattle, and agree with the ideas and methods used to win victories for working people over the last decade, then politically speaking Revolutionary Workers is the organization you joined, refounded. We welcome you to get involved.

We also welcome all members of the ISA who agree with the points in this letter, or have questions, to reach out to us. Our goal is not only to build nationally, but to be part of the project of helping build a new international.

Our goal of socialist revolution will not be possible without a party hardened both in theory and in the class struggle, whether on a small scale or large one. Revolutions themselves are the apex of class struggle, and they can only be prepared for by developing real experience and audacity in leading the working class in the openings for struggle that arise.

As Trotsky noted at the time of the founding of the Fourth International:

"We are not a party as other parties. Our ambition is not only to have more members, more papers, more money in the treasury, more deputies. All that is necessary, but only as a means. Our aim is the full material and spiritual liberation of the toilers and exploited through the socialist revolution. Nobody will prepare it and nobody will guide it but ourselves."

In solidarity,
Kshama Sawant, Seattle
Calvin Priest, Seattle
Steve Edwards, Chicago
Dustin Spence, Chicago
Peter Ralston, Chicago
Sam White, Boston
Willow Reader, Boston

Melanie Senk, Boston
Matthew Meloy, Kansas City
Hunter Hawthorne, Kansas City
David Montequin, Rochester
Jeremy Cragin, Tacoma
Emily McArthur, Seattle
Kailyn Nicholson, Seattle
Adam Ziemkowski, Seattle
Joe Sugrue, Seattle
Joan Wright, Seattle
Shirley Henderson, Seattle
Summer Miller, Seattle
Gwendolyn Hart, Seattle
Justin Bare, Seattle
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Margot Stewart, Seattle
Logan Swan, Seattle
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Dominic Wolfgang Wallace, Seattle
Natalie Bailey, Seattle